tion. I had raised my hand in the beginning. (*Interruptions*)

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, no. Fifteen minutes have already been spent on this question. There are twenty questions. Shri C. Ramachandraiah. (*Interruptions*)

श्री मोहम्मद आज़म खान: इस पर डिस्कशन होना चाहिए....(व्यवधान)

MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE: Sir, I also want to put one question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, no. Already 15 minutes are over. Next question, Mr. Ramachandraiah.

MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE: Sir, I had raised my hand earlier. (*Interruptions*). Everyday this is happening. (*Interruptions*)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next question. Question No. 242. No other thing will go on record.

MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE: Everyday this is happening.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No other thing will go on record. Already 15 minutes are over. (*Interruptions*). Mr. Ramachandraiah. (*Interruptions*). Next question is also very important. Shri Ramachandraiah, please put the question.

Railway facilities at Tirupati

*242. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Tirupati is the largest pilgrim destination in Andhra Pradesh;

(b) whether it is also a fact that Railways have not enhanced facilities for passengers at Tirupati;

(c) what are the present hours for buying reservation tickets at Tirupati and Renigunta in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh;

(d) whether it is a fact that a 24 hour reservation booking facility is direly needed at Tirupati; and

(e) what steps the South Central Railway are taking to make better arrangements for rail users at Tirupati and Renigunta?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI NITISH KUMAR): (a) to (e) A statement is laid on the table of the House.

Statement

(a) Yes, Sir.

(b) No, Sir,

(c) The maximum working hours of computerised reservation offices on all Indian Railways are from 0800 hours to 2000 hours daily and from 0800 hours to 1400 hours on Sundays and the same facility exists at Tirupati and Renigunta also.

(d) No, Sir.

(e) Tirupati and Renigunta stations are provided with amenities commensurate with the volume of passenger traffic. The facilities include adequate number of platforms, cover over platforms, waiting hall, waiting rooms, retiring rooms, seating arrangements, water supply arrangements etc. The amenities are being further augmented by extension of cover over platform and provision of computerised public address system at these Stations. Modern gadgets are also proposed to be provided in the base Kitchen at Tirupati. Besides, there is a proposal to introduce a Shatabdi Express train between Chennai and Tirupati during 1999-2000.

Works for augmenting amenities further will also be considered whenever so warranted by growth in passenger traffic.

SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH. The entire country knows that Tirupati is a very important pilgrimage centre. Daily, thousands of people visit the town to have darshan of Lord Balaji. More than 50 per cent of the pilgrims who visit Tirupati travel by train. But, unfortunately, the number of computer reservation counters working at Tirupati is the same as compared to other areas. The Minister

has said in his statement that the working hours of the counters are from 0800 hours to 2000 hours. There are certain occasions when, for special programmes, like the Brahmotsavam and New Year programmes, more than one lakh people visit per day. For such eventualities, if one has to get reservation for Tirupati, one has to stand for give to six hours. So, I would like to know from the Minister as to why cannot a 24 hour reservation-counter service be introduced at Tirupati and Renigunta. I would also like to know as to why there cannot be more than one counter, like in other cities.

SHRI VAYALAR RAVI: Sir, we all support and demand.

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: The wroking hours of the Reservation Office, in the whole Indian Railway reservation system, is from 0800 hours in the morning up to 2000 hours in the evening, on all working days, except Sundays. On Sundays, it is from 8 o'clock in the morning till 2 o' clock in the afternoon. That is the practice prevailing in the whole Indian Railways reservation system.

So far as the number of reservation counters is concerned, there are three reservation counters at Tirupati and there is one reservation counter at Renigunta. And the daily average reservation transactions handled at these stations is 7089 at Tirupati, and 52 at Renigunta. I think it is sufficient. But if the hon. Member wants that during peak hours, the number of counters should be increased, that could be considered.

SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: The people are facing a lot of difficulty in getting reservation and they are compelled to travel by road. So, the reservatiou figures which you have given show that the people visiting Tirupati are compelled to go by road because of the difficulty in getting reservation.

SHRI VAYALAR RAVI: Darshan is in the morning. For that, they have to stand in the queue. That is the main point.

SHRI K. M. SAIFULLAH: There is one other pilgrimage Centre near Tirupati, where Sai Baba is there. Earlier, there was a direct train from Secunderabad to Dharmavaram on the metre-gauge, but because of its conversion into broad-gauge, it was stopped. Now, as the conversion work has been completed, why can't it be resumed? It will facilitate the passengers. Also, about 100 private buses are minting money, by playing buses from Dharmavaram to Secunderabad.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is all right. (*Interruptions*). Now, Shri Radhakrishna Murty.

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: As far as the facilities to the passengers are concerned... (*Interruptions*)

SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: If the Minister is not aware of it, then he can kindly note it down; enquire about it and inform us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri Radhakrishna Murty.

DR. Y. RADHKRISHNA MURTY: Sir, the Minister is on his legs (*Interruptions*) Speaking about the amenities to the passengers, I think running the trains on time and safty of passengers in the trains are also very important amenities to the passengers. Coming to the first point, the express train between Chennai and Tirupati runs four times a day and every time it is 45 minutes late and in the final lap the train reaches Chennai at mid-night. It is very widely reported in the Press that this particular train runs late every day.

The second point is regarding the safety aspect. Only yesterday it was reported that the train running between Secunderabad and Tirupati was subjected to dacoity in the night between Wednesday and Thursday and the passengers travelling in four bogies were looted of their ornaments, money, etc. Half-a-dozen such incidents had been reported at the same place during the last 15 days. At the same place the Circar Express run-

ning between Secunderabad and Chennai was looted and the Railway Police were unable to trace anything so far. This is also an amenity that the passengers should be able to travel in safety. A lot of docoities and all that take place in this particular line.

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: Sir, the question relates to the amenities being provided at Tirupati station. He is referring to the law and order problem which relates to security and safety of the passengers. Off and on we had discussed it here. We had informed the House about the steps which we are taking.

DR. Y. RADHAKRISHNA MURTY: I think the safety of the passengers is an amenity.

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: So far as the question of train is concerned, we are going to introduce a Shatabdi train between Chennai and Tirupati this year.

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU: Sir, we are thankful to the Minister that he has announced in his Railway Budget the introduction of a Shatabdi train from Chennai to Tirupati. People will welcome it. The main issue, as was raised by Shri Ramachandraiah and other friends is that Tirupati is a very important place for the entire country. On an average 50,000 pilgrims are visiting and having *darshan* of Balaji every day. On festival days it goes up to one lakh. People from various parts of the country, north, south and east and from western countries are coming there. The practical problem is, as you are aware, Sir, that they have to get down at Renigunta and then go to Tirupati or come from Tirupati to Renigunta and catch the train. So, a lot of difficulties are faced by the passengers. The main demand is to bring Tirupati on to the main line or in the alternative to join Renigunta-Tirupati-Cuddapah to Jolarpetta which is pending for so many years. It is not an issue which should be kept in the cold storage. It was kept like that all these years. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether there is any proposal to bring Tirupati on to the main line keeping in view its religious importance all over the country.

Secondly, the work on the line linking Tirupati-Katpadi-Renigunta to the line from Chennai to Kerala and all is going to take place. It takes 60 kilometres from Renigunta to Arakkonam and then come to Jolarpetta. One should really go through that route to understand it. This has been talked about since my childhood, for the last 20 years. No money has been allotted and the work is going at a snail's pace. Will the Minister give priority to it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You are have been much older than 20 years.

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU: The proposal has been pending for so many years. It is a very burning issue. Will the Minister take care of these two aspects and, at least, keep them in this year's Budget and in the next year's Budget?

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: Sir, this supplementary does not relate to the question. But we can discuss it with him.

SHRI N. THALAVAI SUNDARAM: Sir, my learned friends were asking for reservation counters. People coming from various parts of India stay at night in Tirupati. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether there is any proposal to open any counter at Tirumala.

Normally, people are staying at Tirupati for taking *darshan* early in the morning My learned friends were asking this question. My question is different. We are unable to go to Renigunta and other places and get the ticket. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether there is any proposal to open a counter at Tirumala. Is it possible? Can he work out something? Normally, people are staying in the night at Tirumala.

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: No, Sir, There is no such proposal. If he is willing, he can write a letter to me and we will get it examined.